

Excerpts from “History of the Chicago Women’s Club.” 1888. Loyola University Chicago. Women & Leadership Archives. Chicago Woman’s Club. Box 15, Folder 1.

“...The next movement of the [Education] Committee was in the direction of compulsory and industrial education. A petition was presented to the Board of Education asking for the enforcement of the compulsory laws, and, in view of the large amount of vagrancy and crime among children, that one or two ungraded schools be opened in localities where they were most needed, and where industrial work might be combined with a course of elementary study. The petition was courteously received, but the Board replied in substance, that the establishment of such schools belonged to religious and philanthropic societies. Accordingly, after much investigation of the subject, a member of the Committee presented a paper to the Club, entitled the “formation and Re-formation of Character,” Nov. 3, 1886. The immediate result was the organization of the Industrial Arts Association. In the early period of its existence the credit of this movement was mainly due to the Education Committee of the Club, but later developments of the work of the Association are to be credited largely to the Decorative Art Society, and to individual workers in the Club and elsewhere.

“...The Philanthropy Committee, realizing that frequent calls like that in behalf of the Kindergarten should not be made on the treasury, began looking diligently for work not needing money for its accomplishment. The first field was the County jail, and the first work ready to its hand the securing of an appropriation for, and the appointment of a night matron. A day matron had long been employed at the jail for every day except Sunday. This omission was noticed and reform urged, but without success, although the Philanthropy Committee raised money among its members and paid for the extra attendance on Sunday for a long time, hoping to establish a precedent. Many other slight improvements were affected and many radical changes urged on the attention of County officials. Such a reform moves slowly, and there is nothing to recommend but patience and hard work. The County jail still remains the objective point of the Philanthropy Committee. It looks forward to the time when the jail shall only be a place of detention for presumably guilty, but possibly innocent persons; having in its management neither punishment, contamination for its inmates, nor temptation to officials in charge.

The Women’s Christian Temperance Union had secured the appointment of three day matrons for the police stations with an appropriation for a fourth, of which no use was made. The

Philanthropy Committee saw the same necessity in the police stations as in the jail, and undertook to secure the appointment of night matrons. The times were ripe for the movement, and with very little difficulty or delay the request that all women under arrest should be sent to five central stations, where there should be both day and night matrons in attendance, was acceded to. Nothing then remained but to remind the members of the Women's Christian Temperance Union that seven new places had been created which could be filled through their recommendation.

During the year 1885 the Philanthropy Committee did much efficient work. It was divided into four sub-committees, the better to carry on its work of investigation into certain problems pertaining to the proper care of the criminal and dependent classes of society. By this means better knowledge was gained of many charities and schools, present and prospective, of the imprisonment of children, their lives in stores, factories and wretched homes, of industrial schools and homes for dependent children.

These papers were presented, which brought out the full force of the Committee in preparation and discussion. The first was given on February 18, the subject being "Practical Charities," which led to the investigation of every form of public and private charity in the city, county and State, with a comparison of their respective merits. The second, on "Elizabeth Fry," led to a discussion of prison management, both past and present, realizing the need of separate prisons for men and women, and of making all punishment reformatory. The last paper of the year was entitled "Problems of the Street," and was followed early in the next year by one entitled "How shall we free Society from the Criminal Classes?" These papers brought out the first discussion in the Club on compulsory education, that being apparently the most satisfactory solution to one "street problem,"—one which the Club has since set itself energetically to work to accomplish. One of the sub committees, that on compulsory education, worked untiringly, first, alone; then with a similar sub-committee from the Education Committee, for the accomplishment of this object.

"...The work above described has taught those engaged in it to know and feel sorrows and wrongs hitherto but vague traditions in their ears, and helped to open the eyes of women to some of the realities of life that are hourly faced by thousands of other women, the sight of which has warmed their hearts, and quickened their hands and feet in good works. So far one principle has been evolved concerning the administration of State Charities, as well as the general conduct of State reformatories and prisons. It is this: Whenever a woman or girl is in the custody of the State, whether sick, insane or a criminal, or under arrest by the authorities, she is entitled to the protection

and the presence of attendants of her own sex. It is to be hoped the day will soon dawn when this shall be a written law of our country, and that a firm conviction of its justice shall obtain everywhere. Another principle is that the state institutions of charity and justice shall be subject to more rigid oversight by the people themselves. It is the women of the country who must take the first steps in the reformation and transformation of such institutions from the failures they are, into grand and noble monuments of humanity and intelligence.”